

The IMPERTINENCE of CHARLES EDWARD

By H. G. Rhodes



"HAS YOUR
SISTER CHANGED
HER COOK, CAROLINE?"

"That's my idea." And Austin sent for the head waiter. "You can give me a private room for a dinner of ten or twelve this night of next week, can't you?" he inquired of that gentleman. "I'll come in later and order dinner. Austin is the name, Wednesday, yes. Oh, by the bye," as the maître d'hôtel turned to go, "can you tell me, is that lady in white at the next table Lady Susan Simpkins? I think I know her, but I'm not sure."

"No, sir, that is Lady Angela Farnston."

"Oh," said Charles Edward, putting a note of disappointment into his voice. "She is, let me see—"

"She is Lord Emscott's daughter."

"Of course. Thanks, so much," and then to Singer, as Monsieur Rodolphe moved away. "I know one person I shall ask. Let's go to the Gaiety."

The valet at the Berkeley Hotel took away from Mr. Austin's room on Thursday evening a huge pile of weekly and daily papers. There were numbers of the Gossiping Times for the past three months, with portraits and anecdotes, one might have thought, of half the people of England. The smoking-room waiter observed a guest that afternoon deep for hours in the "Blue Book," "Who's Who," and "Burke's Peerage." A clerk in a placidly bookish way sold an irreproachable looking young American a copy of "The Polite Letter Writer." And that evening Charles Edward consigned a number of letters to the post. A glimpse at a few of them may not be uninteresting.

The first was addressed to the Countess of Emscott.

Dear Lady Emscott:

I hope you will remember me and that you and Lord Emscott will pardon rather short notice, and if you are free, dine next Wednesday, the Savoy, 8:30. I can't even call on you before then as in the interval I may have to go North. A fellow-countryman of mine, Edward Singer, is coming, and as all London is clamoring to know him soon, on account of his exploits in Eastern Turkestan, I am seizing the earliest opportunity to profit by my friendship with a new celebrity.

Do you remember promising me at Monte Carlo last February that I should meet your daughter in London? Will you bring Lady Angela to dine? It will just make my number even.

Yours most sincerely,
CHARLES EDWARD AUSTIN.

"Is there anything interesting in your letters, mother?" asked Lady Angela the following morning at breakfast in Grosvenor Crescent.

"Nothing much. Invitations. One from a Mr. Austin whom I seem to have met last winter at Monte Carlo."

"Who was he, Caroline?" asked her husband.

"That's what I don't seem to remember, Frederick. Helena Frampton always had a great many young men about. I forget their names."

"You would, dear Caroline, wouldn't you?" His wife's uncertain memory was one of the few trials of his life.

"I remember hearing of him," said Angela, "from Mrs. Frampton. Mother was considered to have flirted disgracefully with him."

"Angela, you are outrageous," Lady Emscott gasped.

"Yes, I know I am. What right does he want us to dine?"

Lady Emscott read the note.

"That 'fellowcountrymen' means that he is an American," observed Lady Angela.

"We certainly shan't dine with him when your mother doesn't remember him."

"I remember him well enough, Frederick; that is as well, as I remember any of Helena's young men."

"Wednesday is a free evening," was Lady Angela's comment. She cared very little for unoccupied hours during the London season.

"It doesn't need to be," said her mother. "Your Aunt Emily wants us to come there that night. And afterward—where is her note? Oh, afterward there will be some more people in and a little talk on the housing problem by an expert from the county council."

Lord Emscott looked up apprehensively from the Times.

"Has your sister changed her cook, Caroline?"

"No, I don't think so."

"We know the Savoy hasn't, father."

"That quite apart, perhaps Eastern Turkestan interests me fully as much as the housing problem. I think we had better accept, Caroline."

The Gossiping Times said that Mrs. Fred Wilding was a lion-hunter, Charles Edward's note to her was a simple task.

"Dear Mrs. Wilding:

"Will you dine with one American to meet another, Wednesday next, the Savoy, 8:30? Edward Singer is my lion. He is just back from Central Asia and is going to make us forget Lander and Sven Hedin in no time. I am also asking Lord and Lady Emscott and the William Northbridges."

Yours most sincerely,
CHARLES EDWARD AUSTIN."

Mrs. Wilding remarked to a friend the next evening that really it was getting to a point in London where you rarely knew your host or hostess, or they you. But she asked in the next sentence whether Lady Wynche knew Edward Singer, the great explorer. Singer, it appeared, would be



"HERE IT COMES,"
SAID CHARLES EDWARD
BENEATH HIS BREATH

MOST people who know Charles Edward Austin and Lady Angela have heard the story of their first meeting. But, although every one ought to know this amazing and delightful couple; many do not; so the tale is worth telling. It is rather surprising that it has never found its way into the newspapers, for the marriage attracted an enormous amount of attention.

Charles Edward's reputation at Harvard had caused a number of elderly Boston women to say that he must be quite mad. But since his graduation, which, to every one's astonishment, he accomplished with honors, very little had been heard of him. He had been making, in leisurely fashion a tour round the world.

In June of '98 he had progressed as far as Paris, coming from the East, and after leaving there he met, on the boat crossing the Channel, Edward Singer, whom he had known at Cambridge when he himself was a sophomore and Singer a senior. "Since that time I have graduated and seen a good many places that any one, even Cook's people, can see; while you've been somewhere," was the polite way in which Charles Edward summed up their interchange of confidences. Singer was going to London with the manuscript of a book on Eastern Turkestan in his luggage. He had been there for two years, and when Charles Edward announced that he considered his friend the only authority on Central Asia, he only uttered the unspoken hope of Singer's heart.

Strange to relate, the train drew into Charing Cross Station on time. It was the second time that month that this had happened, a porter remarked with admiration, and it was only the 28th. When the train does arrive when it should one can go to one's hotel, dress comfortably, and dine at a reasonable hour. Even authorities on Central Asia must eat and go to the Gaiety Theatre, Charles Edward said; so 9 o'clock found the two friends finishing coffee on the terrace of the Savoy, while the fading light over the river and the gardens began to grow a deep purplish blue by contrast with the glow inside.

"Ought we to go on to the theatre?" asked Singer, after consulting his watch.

"Some time, I suppose," was the answer. "But when I was here before, a long time ago, I learned one great fact about English life, which is that no one has ever seen the beginning of a Gaiety place. It wouldn't be legal, I believe. What the first half of the first act is like is one of the great mysteries of London."

"That sounds enormously experienced. Joking aside, do you know London well?"

"I have a few esoteric bits of information like that, but—know London? No."

"I was thinking really of knowing people," Singer looked around the room with manifest satisfaction. "One wouldn't mind."

It was a pleasant sight even for one who was not fresh from the regions of the barbarians. Half the tables were still filled, and the restaurant, with its low ceiling and its dark, mahogany-paneled walls, looked like a warm, glowing cave. At a table near by a party of eight were dining. Fac-

ing Austin sat a girl with a quiet face, but an infinite fund of laughter in her eyes. Not much description is needed; every one has seen Lady Angela's portrait in the Illustrated papers. Charles Edward withdrew his gaze from her.

"Mind!" he exclaimed. "Rather not. No, I don't know anybody here. I have a cousin who has bagged an English husband. If she were here she would fix me. But the silly woman has chosen just this time to go to America on a visit. She is sending some letters for me, I believe, but they haven't come. And she won't be back herself for three weeks or so. But even if one got acquainted, one couldn't be sure of getting acquainted with just the people one wants to know."

His eye rested again upon the girl at the table nearby.

"How ridiculous all this business of introductions is anyhow, Singer. Here you and I are for only a little time. We should love to give dinners here every night and ask quantities of these charming people. We can't, because we don't know them. And so we've got to spend all the time we have for London in making friends and getting ready to enjoy it."

"It's a dazzling prospect, but if I gave dinners every night they would soon degenerate into buns and milk at the—what do they call 'em, the A B C shops. You can talk about the Savoy."

"That's nothing." Austin was honestly honest about his money. "I don't exactly know what the current quotations on Central Asian books are, but

I'll bet that in two weeks you will sell yours for hundreds of guineas, crowns, florins and ha'pence of their ridiculous money. But until then I'll be the host at our dinners."

"I might venture to do that myself, I suppose as long as we don't know any one to ask."

"Yes, I suppose you must know them," meditated Charles Edward. Then suddenly, "I have an idea, Singer."

"Don't boast," his companion counseled.

"Will you dine here with me a week from to-night?"

"Gladly," laughed Singer; "that's simple."

"And wouldn't you rather be surrounded by distinguished Londoners and beautiful English women than to feed alone with me?"

"Yes, I should."

"Oh, but they shall think they know this with a gesture."

"Don't knock over that bottle. I'll come to dinner, but you won't get any one else. I don't believe that even good dinners like this are so rare in London that people will come to dine with a total stranger in order to get one."

"Oh, but they shall think they know me."

"If you are going to do it under an assumed name, why not issue a royal command for a state dinner at Buckingham Palace?"

"I shall use my own name of Charles Edward Austin."

"But how?"